

The Campaign against Venereal Diseases in the Province of Quebec

We commend to the attention of medical men everywhere, and indeed to all members of the non-medical public who may see this, the arresting article by Dr. Jules Archambault entitled "The Necessity for Legislation and Social Service in Order to Eradicate Syphilis in the Province of Quebec." Dr. Archambault is Sero-logist and Director of the Division of Venereal Diseases, Ministry of Health, Province of Quebec, and also is Associate in charge of the Dermato-syphilological Service of the Hotel-Dieu of Montreal. He, therefore, is in a position to know whereof he speaks.

Three subjects of medical concern stand out pre-eminently in the progress of any country, of Canada no less than any other. These are Cancer, Tuberculosis, and Venereal Diseases. Always important, they become more insistent in time of war, when it is vital that the health of a nation be brought to and maintained at the highest peak possible. This would seem to be an appropriate time to increase our efforts here in Canada.

For the time being we can do little more in the case of cancer than to insist on earlier diagnosis and to improve our methods of treatment by means of surgical intervention and the use of radium. We do not know its cause. With regard to tuberculosis we are in a better position. We know the cause and how to prevent its operation, though we have no specific cure by means of drugs. The eradication of tuberculosis is by no means complete, but is within sight. With syphilis we are in a still better position, scientifically speaking. We know and understand the germ causing it, we know the many pathological conditions which it causes; we have curative drugs which are very effective. That being the case, why not apply our knowledge? This, practically, is not so easy as it would seem. Even more than in the case of the two conditions first mentioned, if that be possible, do we need the co-operation of all classes of the community—the public, to realize the situation and be willing to bring their problems to the proper quarter; the doctors, to acquaint themselves with the most approved lines of treatment and to apply them efficiently; and the public health authorities, clothed with authority, to co-ordinate the whole effort.

Time was when there were certain "magnificent reticences" and some not so magnificent. That time is past. We may now "call a spade a spade". People are, generally, much more health-conscious than they were; they are looking for light. But, they need competent advisers and leaders. In addition to medical men newspapers and service clubs can do much in this regard.

In the case of syphilis, however, there is always the element of shame to be considered.

Some are loath to report their condition. Even if they do they cannot always be depended upon to carry out their treatment faithfully, for it is long, tedious and unpleasant. Syphilis is curable, but is deceptive in that insufficient treatment, while it removes the more obtrusive external manifestations, may still leave the patient in a condition dangerous to himself and others.

We no longer see the disgusting gross manifestations of syphilis in our hospitals. This does not mean that there is less syphilis about. It does not necessarily mean that the disease is milder in type, and is dying out. We have known of syphilis now for about four hundred years, and this is not likely. It is much more probable that most cases of the disease receive nowadays some amount of treatment which modifies its course without curing it. If so, the situation remains highly dangerous and demands remedy.

Syphilis not only affects the individual himself but may be communicated to his entourage, and to his children of the second and third generation. It may attack any system of the body and helps to fill our insane asylums. All this is nothing new, of course, but is merely cited to call attention once more to a dangerous situation and to support the efforts of those who are endeavouring to remedy it. Notably, we would like to pay tribute to the work of the various boards of health throughout Canada and of the Health League of Canada, among others.

In order to make progress we need still more publicity, more education, more extended facilities for notification, treatment, and follow-up. And it is in these particulars that the health authorities in the Province of Quebec need more extended powers. Fresh legislation is required to make the measures in force at the present time more effective.

Twenty years ago an antivenereal disease campaign was inaugurated in the Province of Quebec. The results were an improvement on earlier conditions, but it was found that the plan instituted was too limited in scope. As a consequence the benefits derived from it were also limited. In spite of it the incidence of venereal diseases seems to be on the increase. It is high time for betterment. It will surprise many to learn that in the Province of Quebec syphilis is not notifiable. Here, at the start, is a serious limitation to the effective control of these diseases. It is also necessary to clothe boards of health with sufficient authority to enforce necessary regulations. Laboratories should be more fully utilized, and the necessary funds provided to ensure more widespread treatment. Dr. Archambault's article deserves careful study. He has set forth the situation fairly, and we have no hesitation in endorsing his statements and in supporting his program.

A.G.N.